January 6, 2022

Dear Campus Community,

As we ready for the return of students for spring semester, we are closely monitoring the surge in COVID-19 cases evident within our campus community, throughout Massachusetts and across the nation. UMass Amherst has prepared well for this surge of the Omicron variant, and we have many public health measures in place for managing the impact of COVID-19 that will allow our community to move forward with in-person teaching, learning and research activities. These include our highly vaccinated community, booster shot requirement, extensive testing protocols, and face-covering policies. Please review in detail the spring public health requirements provided below.

It is vital that we continue to assess all the trends in COVID-19, including the variants that emerge, and adapt accordingly. As we near the third year of the pandemic, it is clear that COVID-19 will be present for the foreseeable future. Importantly, we have learned that vaccinations, boosters and wearing masks indoors help prevent spikes of severely ill people. The current scientific data shows that those who are vaccinated and boosted and become infected are often asymptomatic or experience mild symptoms. Medical experts now observe that more significant than traditional case counts are the effectiveness of measures designed to prevent severe illness and hospitalization, as well as continuing to provide accommodations for vulnerable populations.

The pandemic has extracted a great toll, and at the same time we have learned how to mitigate its severity through scientific advances and daily operation of the campus. Our educational mission has never been more important, and we are positioned to sustain in-person instruction and activities because our students, faculty and staff have demonstrated a commitment to the best public health practices.

The latest COVID-19 testing data for the UMass community from Dec. 29 to Jan. 4 shows 360 new positive cases. The university’s cumulative positivity rate is 13.21%. The state’s seven-day positivity rate is 22.06%. Cases are primarily from transmission that occurred due to holiday gatherings and travel over the break. Most cases are of short duration resulting in mild-to-moderate illness, and there is one current hospitalization.

**Immediate Requirements and Spring Protocols**
All eligible UMass Amherst students are required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot as we begin the spring semester. You can make an appointment by identifying a location through the Massachusetts COVID-19 vaccine finder or Vaccines.gov. The Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC) vaccine clinic is also open. Please visit the clinic’s website to book an appointment. If you contacted COVID-19 during winter break, per CDC guidance you can receive a booster shot once your symptoms are resolved and your isolation period is complete.

All UMass Amherst students are expected to undergo an advance COVID-19 test between 10 and 14 days prior to the start of spring classes on Jan. 25, 2022. The advance testing program will help provide the university an assessment of COVID-19 infections as the semester begins, and it allows any student who tests positive to meet the isolation requirements before classes start and therefore not miss any in-person instruction time.

Students who live in the Greater Boston area have access to self-administered, unobserved COVID-19 testing on the Mount Ida Campus (100 Carlson Avenue, Newton). Test kits and a drop box are accessible on the first floor of the Campus Center (Building 11) near the ATM. Parking is available in the visitor lot. Test kits are collected for analysis each Thursday at noon. It is therefore advisable that self-administered tests are conducted and dropped off on Wednesdays or on Thursday mornings.

All eligible faculty and staff are required to get a vaccine booster.

All faculty and staff should take a COVID-19 PCR test by Jan. 18. Observed testing is available at the PHPC in the Campus Center. Test kits for unobserved testing are also available there. Unobserved tests can be dropped off at a designated test collection site.

Face coverings are required on campus in all campus buildings regardless of vaccination status. A mask should have two or more layers, completely cover the nose and mouth, and fit snugly against the side of the face, without gaps. KN-95 masks and surgical masks are encouraged. Gaiters, single-layer cloth masks and masks with vents should not be used.

New isolation guidance: UMass follows new federal and state guidance regarding a five-day isolation period for students, faculty and staff who test positive and do not have symptoms.

Everyone must continue to monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms every day before coming to campus. If you feel unwell, stay home. Testing is free and readily available at the PHPC. During winter break PHPC’s testing hours are modified, so please check the UMass testing website for hours.
We thank everyone for their continual support in keeping the campus safe as we embark upon a new semester in 2022.

Sincerely,
Co-Directors of the Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC)

Ann Becker, Public Health Director
Jeffrey Hescock, Executive Director of Environmental Health and Safety

University of Massachusetts Amherst